

La Salle University

## La Salle University Digital Commons

---

Explorer Café

Explorer Connection

---

4-8-2020

### Can the Average American Counter Russian Interference in the U.S. Elections?

Mark A. Thomas PhD

*La Salle University*, [thomasm@lasalle.edu](mailto:thomasm@lasalle.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/explorercafe>

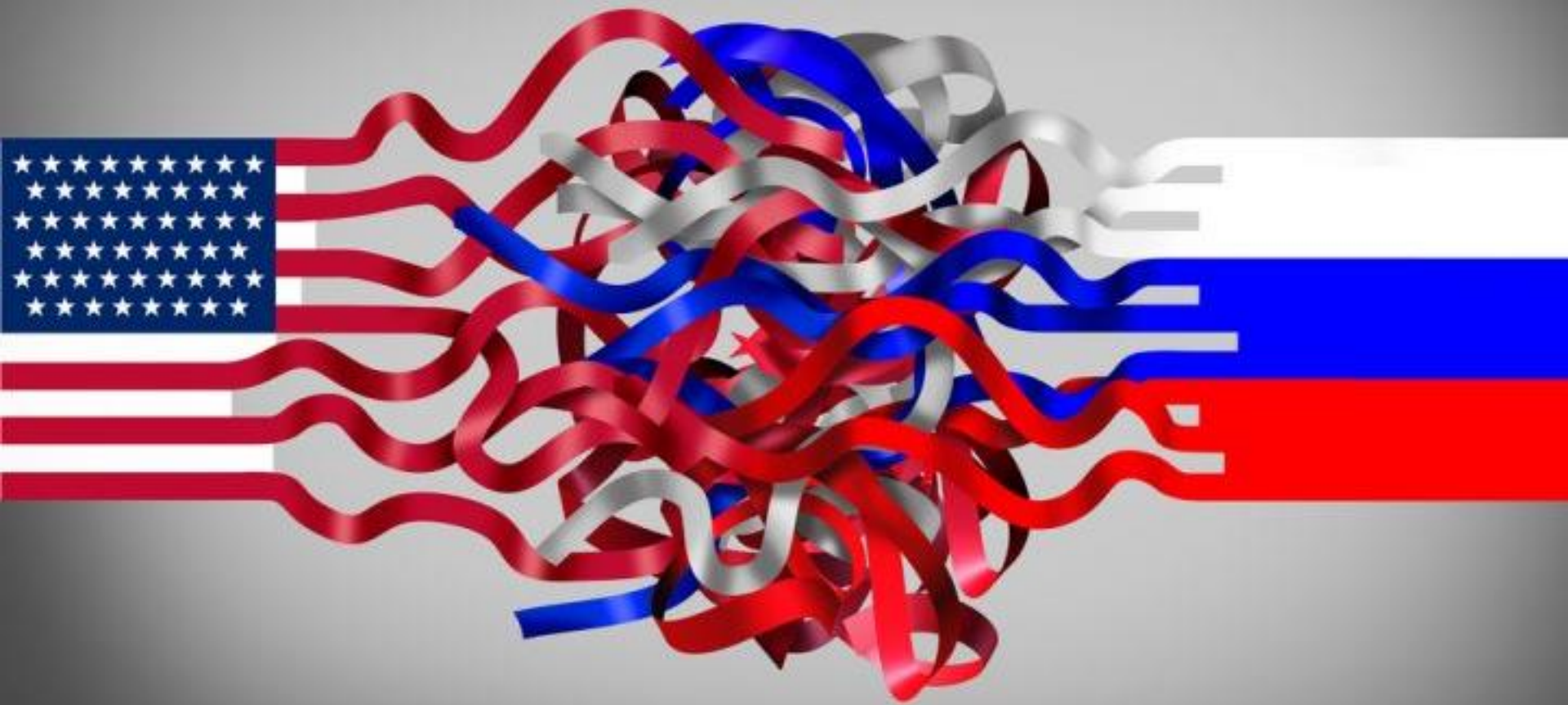
---

#### Recommended Citation

Thomas, Mark A. PhD, "Can the Average American Counter Russian Interference in the U.S. Elections?" (2020). *Explorer Café*. 95.

<https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/explorercafe/95>

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Explorer Connection at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Explorer Café by an authorized administrator of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [careyc@lasalle.edu](mailto:careyc@lasalle.edu).



# Countering Foreign Influence Operations in US Elections

Explore Café, 8 April  
2020





- Oldest and most reliable means of influencing the outcome of an adversary's politics
- Exploits pre-existing social divisions within a society (Race, Class, Ethnicity, Gender, Fear, etc)
- Aims to undermine confidence in political and social institutions

“The ability to maintain confidence and respond appropriately to information influence activities with fact-based, trustworthy messages is essential for a resilient, healthy democratic society.”

Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency

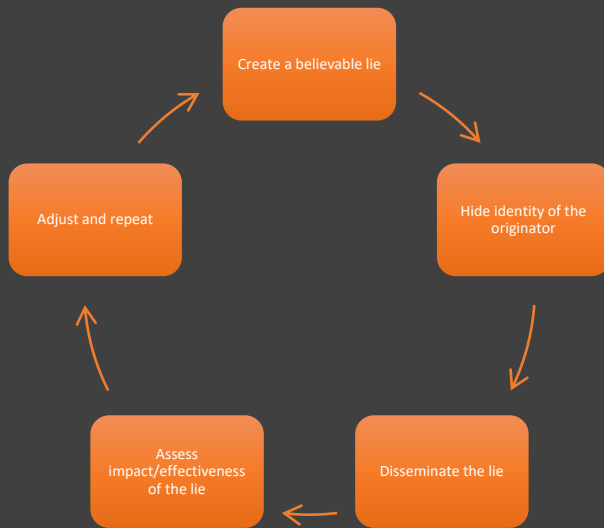


# 2016 Elections

- Aims:
  - Bolster likelihood of Trump victory
  - **Sow discord and increase partisan polarization**
- Tactics:
  - Suppress African-American and Latino voting
  - Divide liberal voters between Clinton, Stein (Greens) and Johnson (Libertarian)
  - Increase solidarity and resolve of conservative voters
- Delivery Systems: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, “Useful idiots”, and ultimately mainstream media
- Techniques:
  - Weaponized intelligence (hacked emails)
  - General disinformation (lies with a kernel of truth embedded)
  - “Virtual protest organizers”



# Basic Rules of Active Measure



# 2020 Elections

## Expect Russians to:

- Sow discord and exacerbate partisan polarization.
- Play the “race card,” e.g. stop and frisk policies, mass incarceration, police brutality.
- Exploit the “Bernie factor” if Biden wins the election.
- Exploit corona virus response (rich vs poor)
- Exaggerate threat posed by foreigners (Asians, Latinos, Muslims)
- Incite protests between rival groups
- Create/forged stories showing corruption, incompetence or biases of the candidate(s).
- Find a useful idiot (or co-optee) to relay their messages via social media, YouTube, etc.



# Design an Information Operation to get a US candidate elected to office

Instructions: In small groups, design an information campaign directed at

- favoring one candidate or another OR
- sowing discord/partisan polarization

Include these key elements

- Theme
- Based on theme, write a “believable lie.”
- Target Audience
- Delivery system (media channel)

Product for Larger Group

- One member of each group presents their campaign
- Provide a verbal summary



# Our Goal: Counter Influence Operations

What should be our specific tasks?

- ❖ Protect democratic principles (Freedom of expression, democratic dialogue, free and open debate)
- ❖ Maintain social and political stability in our communities (democratic, open, peaceful dialogue and social movements)
- ❖ Make yourself and others aware of the existence and methods of influence operations
- ❖ Be able to identify influence operations



# Recognizing Information Warfare

- Media
  - Majority of the content is persuasive, not informative.
  - Vague or unverifiable sources (“anonymous government source,” “a Bangladeshi newspaper.”)
  - Misspellings or poor grammar in the content
  - Bandwagoning via Bots
- Protests
  - Organizer is not local and needs your assistance in arranging the protest
  - Organizer is an unknown or unverifiable organization



# Indicators of a Bot

1. No or stolen profile picture
2. Extremely high number of responses
3. Bot names with random letters, numbers
4. Recently created site or time lapse between previous and most recent post.
5. Grammatical errors
6. Extreme rhetoric aimed at social/political divisions
7. Unverifiable user or profile
8. Frequent contact with other suspicious profiles

How to spot a BOT:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/chat-bot-canada-federal-election-disinformation-1.5270765>

